

Charge  
To the Iowa Task Force on Professional Levels and Competencies  
From the Iowa Department of Education  
And Early Childhood Iowa Professional Development Steering Committee

## INTRODUCTION

Research increasingly demonstrates the importance of quality early learning environments to a child's development and learning, especially during the years prior to kindergarten. It also is increasingly recognized that the competence of children's teachers is a significant contributor to the effectiveness of these out-of-home learning environments. Iowa has been working to improve program quality through the development of early learning standards (skills young children should have), preschool program standards (the quality of preschool programs for three- and four-year-olds), a child care rating system (the quality of child care programs for birth- to school age), and the Iowa Core Curriculum essential skills and concepts for kindergarten (to be developed). Development of updated teacher competencies associated with different levels of proficiency and aligned with state and national standards is the next step toward ensuring the effectiveness of children's early learning environments in out-of-home settings.

## CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Iowa's child care and early education programs<sup>1</sup> have widely varying standards and expectations for teachers of young children. For instance, Department of Human Services (DHS) regulations permit an adult with no formal education to serve as the teacher in a child care center or community-based preschool. Iowa's new Statewide Voluntary Preschool Program for Four Year Olds requires an appropriately licensed teacher who has a bachelor's degree with an early childhood endorsement. Similar expectations exist for teachers of children in kindergarten through third grade. Most recently, Head Start regulations are requiring an increasing proportion of teachers to have four year degrees.

Efforts in Iowa to increase competencies for early care and education teaching staff<sup>2</sup> have begun addressing the need for better prepared personnel, but Iowa still falls short of establishing consistent state requirements for all teaching personnel of young children,

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<sup>1</sup> The term *early care and education* falls within the "early learning oval" of the Iowa Early Care, Health, and Education system diagram and encompasses both "early care" and "education."

<sup>2</sup> The term *early care and education teaching staff* refers to all members of the teaching team who work directly with children, including teachers and assistant teachers/teacher aides, in child care, Head Start, preschool/pre-kindergarten, and kindergarten regardless of program auspice. Teachers are defined as those adults with primary responsibility for a group of children. Assistant teachers/teacher aides are adults who work under the direct supervision of a teacher. This definition is taken from the NAEYC Early Childhood Program Standards and Criteria and falls within the "early learning oval" of the Iowa Early Care, Health, and Education system diagram.

birth through kindergarten. With increasing public and legislative expectations that children will enter school ready to succeed and meet state performance standards, along with stronger program standards requirements being advanced by state and national organizations such as Iowa Quality Preschool Program Standards, NAEYC's (National Association for the Education of Young Children) Early Childhood Program Standards and Accreditation Criteria, and requirements outlined in the most recent reauthorization of Head Start, demand is growing for better prepared early care and education teaching staff.

Additionally, the state's changing demographics points to an increasingly diverse child population. The complexion of the early care and education workforce has remained unchanged, pointing to the need for more targeted recruitment strategies.

This coalescence of forces is propelling Iowa to implement a cohesive statewide system of professional development. This demand, in turn, creates an opportunity for developing updated competency and proficiency levels that can encompass all early care and education teaching staff.

This is not a new conversation in Iowa. We have engaged in conversations about professional development for an extended period of time. The time has arrived when we must move beyond conversation and engage in decision making. Elevated program standards, increased personnel requirements, and escalating demands for student achievement are increasingly defining the work of early care and education teaching staff. The responsibility to define performance expectations, outline the preparation necessary to meet these expectations, and prepare the system infrastructure that will be needed so all who choose can fulfill these requirements no longer can be delayed.

In response, an interagency effort led by the Iowa Department of Education and Early Childhood Iowa Professional Development Steering Committee is convening the Task Force on Professional Levels and Competencies to address this issue and provide recommendations. The creation of this Task Force is one more step in the State's efforts to create a comprehensive early care, health, and education professional development system.

#### CHARGE

The Task Force on Professional Development Levels and Competencies will identify proficiency levels and associated competencies for teaching staff of children from birth through kindergarten that:

- Address all teaching staff in the State's early care and education system, regardless of program type or auspice;
- Ensure teaching staff have the prerequisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet required quality program standards and State early learning standards;

- Address the knowledge, skills, and dispositions individuals need to know and be able to do to be recognized as early care and education teachers or assistant teachers/teacher aides of children from birth through kindergarten;
- Identify proficiency levels for early care and education teaching staff and the performance competencies associated with each of them;
- Update/revise the States Core Body of Knowledge for Best Practices for teaching staff of children birth through kindergarten;
- Identify levels of professional development and to recommend competencies associated with each of the professional development levels identified;
- Ensure that the recommended proficiency levels and competencies consider required program standards and teacher preparation requirements;
- Ensure that the recommended competencies align with the Iowa Core Curriculum essential skills and concepts kindergarten to grade 3; and,
- Ensure that the recommended proficiency levels and competencies advance the State's efforts to create a cohesive early care, health, and education professional development system.

The Task Force recommendations will be submitted to the Iowa Department of Education and Early Childhood Iowa (ECI) Professional Development Steering Committee for review. ECI's State Agency Liaison Team (SALT) will serve as an ad hoc advisor and will be asked to assume responsibility for contributing toward implementation of the final recommendations.